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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 001960

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TAGS: [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: ASSESSING RECENT VIOLENCE IN JERUSALEM

REF: A. JERUSALEM 1739  
[B](#). JERUSALEM 1755  
[C](#). JERUSALEM 1766  
[D](#). TEL AVIV 2234  
[E](#). TEL AVIV 2227

Classified By: Consul General Daniel Rubinstein  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. While recent skirmishes on the Haram al-Sharif / Temple Mount over the past month are troubling, stabilizing factors have kept these incidents from sparking broader unrest. Neither the GOI nor the PA appear to be inciting violence, though individual leaders have been less restrained. Another factor is the Israeli National Police (INP) response, as well as PA security force (PASF) efforts to channel demonstrations away from traditional flashpoints in the West Bank. The separation barrier and the absence of Palestinian political organization both play a stabilizing role, though the longer-term implications of both factors on East Jerusalem's Arab population may be more negative. International scrutiny plays a role as well. End Summary.

RECENT JERUSALEM VIOLENCE...

[1](#)2. (SBU) Three times in the past four weeks, violence has broken out in Jerusalem's Old City. Rumors of, or actual attempts by, radical groups to access the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif plaza in order to conduct Jewish religious rites and assert greater Israeli authority over the compound, appeared to precipitate each incident. Muslim worshippers (both East Jerusalem residents and Israeli Arabs) have mobilized in protest, leading to skirmishes with Israeli police (see refs A-D for more information).

...TEMPERED BY STABILIZING FACTORS

[1](#)3. (C) So far, these incidents of violence have been contained in duration and scope. During each incident, life has continued as normal in Jerusalem outside the Old City's walls -- and even in much of the Old City itself, which remains heavily touristed. Our contacts generally say that tensions have risen of late, due to perceptions of a stalemated peace process, the presence of large numbers of Jewish worshippers during the High Holidays, settler-Palestinian violence associated with the olive harvest, and widespread media coverage of Old City clashes on Arab satellite networks (from which most Palestinians get their news). While this has led some contacts to compare aspects of the current situation to conditions that existed before the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000, a number of stabilizing factors, which were not in place in the past, appear to have kept these incidents from spreading:

-- Our contacts generally agree that neither the GOI nor the PA leadership appears to be inciting violence directly. (That said, many feel the other side could do far more in their public statements to counter radical messaging and create an environment less conducive for provocateurs.) Certain individual leaders have been less helpful in this regard. Several Palestinian contacts described an October 25 meeting of prominent Likud and National Union figures, plus Jerusalem's deputy mayor, in support of an increased Jewish presence on the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif as validation of what they view as a deliberate strategy to change the status quo. Also on Oct 25, the PA-owned WAFA News Agency quoted the PA Minister of Religious Affairs Mahmoud al-Habash as calling on "our people to remain vigilant and 'murabit' (present in guarding) at Al-Aqsa."

-- Inside Jerusalem, based on our direct observation, the INP response appears to have been measured and proportional, though the Waqf has complained that the INP refused to close the Mughrabi Gate (the sole entrance for non-Muslim visitors) prior to several of these instances. It is unclear whether an informal Palestinian security presence in East Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods acts as a stabilizing factor, but we have neither seen any evidence that this presence has organized or incited violence. In the West Bank, PASF are under instructions from the PA leadership to funnel any protests away from potential flashpoints, such as settlements and IDF checkpoints, and towards Area A city centers, where they can be peacefully contained and dispersed without Israeli engagement. Senior security officials tell Post that plain-clothes and undercover PASF have on occasion posed as protesters to help maintain control of these events.

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-- The impact of the separation barrier in East Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods has not been as radicalizing as many of our contacts initially predicted. At this stage, the main impact of the barrier has been to deny Palestinians access to East Jerusalem, severing West Bankers' access to the city. While we continue to have concerns about the economic and political impact of this dynamic in the longer term, the barrier may play a role in keeping West Bank-based security threats out.

-- The near total absence of Palestinian political organization in East Jerusalem means there is no structure to organize a campaign of violence. (The only organized efforts we have seen to date are by Israeli Arabs from the northern town of Um al-Fahm, who appear organized by the Arab Islamic Movement led by Sheikh Raed Saleh.) As with the barrier, this is a mixed blessing, as the absence of political organization prevents these communities from effectively interfacing with the Municipality and the GOI.

-- International scrutiny, particularly Jordanian involvement through the Waqf, may have played a role in the swift restoration of access to the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif for Muslim worshippers following security closures. Note: Jordan's special role at this holy site is an element of the 1994 Israel-Jordan peace treaty. Ref E provides additional details on recent Jordanian engagement. End Note.

WHAT WE WATCH FOR

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14. (C) Post continues to monitor incidents in Jerusalem that have the potential to spark violent protest. These include home demolitions and settlement construction in East Jerusalem, and provocative visits to, or announcements regarding, sensitive archeological projects in the Old City area and/or the Temple Mount / Haram al-Sharif. In the West Bank, Post monitors key points of friction between Israelis (IDF and settlers) and Palestinians. In particular, the IDF response to weekly demonstrations against the separation barrier in Bil'in/Ni'lin and Jayyus is an important

indication of the IDF's ability to maintain a calibrated response (i.e., non-lethal riot control versus live fire) to civil unrest in areas outside PA control. In areas under PA security control, or on the dividing lines between Areas A (full control) and B (partial control), we assess, based on PASF actions, whether the PA aims to defuse tensions, neglects them through inaction, or fans them. These areas include Rachel's Tomb on Bethlehem's edge, the line between H-1 and H-2 in Hebron, entrances to Nablus, and key points in Ramallah.

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